

# Honoring the Ancestors

## Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists

### A Place for *Non-Standard Folks*

by Liz and Bob Fisher

For four years, in the 1980s, and again for four years, in the 1990s, we were members of BFUU; years full of adventure, activity, group process and lots of warm moments. An important and meaningful place for us when we were active, we met fine people, many who were much older than ourselves at the time. The intergenerational experience we were able to have at the Fellowship is one we truly cherish. Many of our friends from our days at the Fellowship have since passed on; still their importance to us and the Fellowship continues.

#### Leaders in the 1980's

When we joined the Fellowship in January of 1985, the overall attitude was one of tolerance of diversity, marked by lively dialogue following the services, many of which were lay lead. We felt a common bond with the other members because we shared liberal values, appreciated artistic offerings, enjoyed gathering to sing folk and protest songs, and undertook philosophical and spiritual inquiry. Although there are many more who deserve to be remembered, these particular members especially stand out for us. On individual pages we share images and statements about:

Harold Rossman, Ruth Dunbar, John Dunbar, Helene Goodwin, Geneva Gates

Dub Blackwood and Earl Holtz were also important to our participation, especially their leadership as Board President (Dub) and Treasurer (Earl) during the mid-1990's. Dub was a great professional clown to boot. They both had been members for decades. We enjoyed working with them when we were actively engaged in administrative tasks at the Fellowship.

#### Literary and Artistic Lights

**Larry Berger, Paul Rider, and Nell Lutz** were all writers who shared their wisdom freely and joyfully. Each published books of poetry and/or essays. They would read or speak during programs and services, offering originality and social insight. **Julian Sondin** was an architect and artist. He (and his wife Janet) made major contributions to the Fellowship. Julian developed a plan to bring in adequate power, good overhead lighting, heating and ventilation that was fully funded by donations from Fellowship members. He was also a stunning visual artist, adept at using multiple technical processes.

# Harold Rossman, 1910 - 1997

“My parents came from different parts of the Russian Empire. My father was brought here from Bessarabia (now Moldavia) as an infant and grew up back of the stockyards in an Irish working class neighborhood. My mother came from Lithuania, as a 15-year-old girl, sent for by her brother who had established himself in Chicago. I was named *Chaim*, but you couldn't send a kid to school with that name in our neighborhood, so I became Harold.”

From “Sayings of Chairman Harold” Volume IV (posthumous):

**Regarding: Fate vs. Free Will, Chance vs. Choice**

There's no conflict, both are involved.

*Without the chance, there is no choice to make.*

For most of his career, Harold was a labor journalist. He managed several large publications and reported on many events important to the history of worker's rights. Harold started coming to BFUU sometime in the early seventies after he attended a picnic and found himself in a “gaggle” of very interesting people, most of whom came to this Fellowship.

At first he remained a contributing non-member in keeping with his militant atheist beliefs, in part a reaction to his Orthodox Jewish upbringing. But, after some time, he discovered many other members were atheists, so he joined and became a leader, serving as President of the Board twice, as well as on numerous committees. He believed in both Roberts Rules of Order and full disclosure by the Board and Minister. That was Harold's official side.

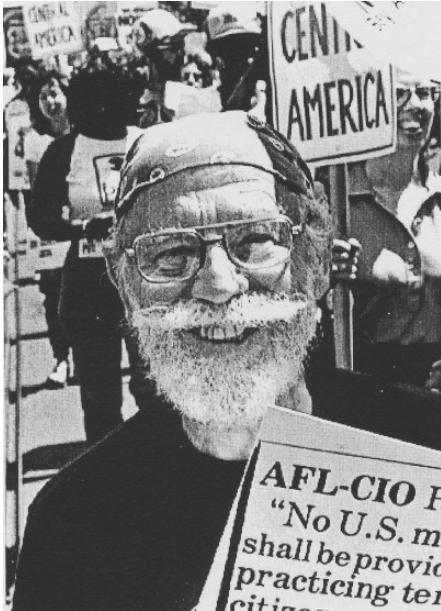
Informally, he never hesitated to engage a controversy or share his philosophy. Over the years, his atheism softened to agnosticism, though the exact qualities of the divine Harold envisioned were far from the Father God of Judaism or Christianity.

He “religiously” participated in the *Talking Stick Sharing Circle* (a group of elders who met regularly) and the BFUU *Joyful Noise Choir*. His tie dye shirts, gorgeous beads and jewelry, which he treasured, and his distinctive height set him apart. He was a Tai Chi enthusiast, learning to use the practice to find his center point, often doing Tai Chi standing for long stretches, as well as using Tai Chi pedal when he was driving!

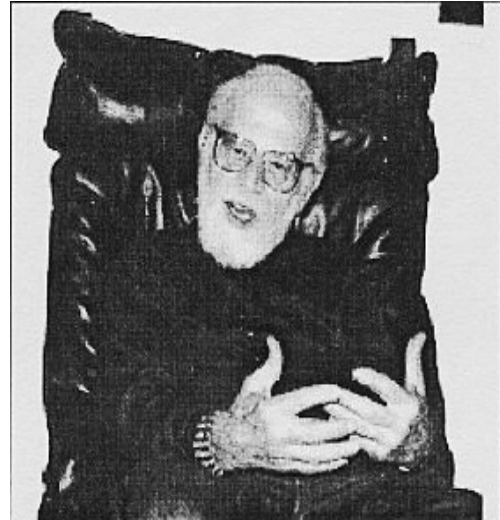
Harold loved being part of BFUU, which he fondly called a congregation of *non-standard folks*.

# L'CHIAM

(“To Life”)



1980s



1990s

A quotation Harold liked and wanted to pass on: **“Anyone who outgrew his idealism never had any.”**

~ Kurt Vonnegut

## Harold’s Philosophy

We should not lose heart.

The reactionaries are just that and cannot build anything new.

If we do honest bookkeeping when we apply our values and do not become overwhelmed, we will prevail.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love humanity.

Believe in the goodness of people.

We are the people.

The cup is half full, not half empty.

# Ruth Dunbar, circa 1920 - 2004



This card Ruth sent to us reflects her love of cottages and the English countryside.  
Ruth writes: "John and I spent five delicious weeks here in 1994."

The Dunbar family became active UUs in 1958; moved to Berkeley in 1964; and joined BFUU in 1983. Ruth served as Vice President of BFUU for two years in the 1980's. She also organized many social occasions at the Fellowship, soliciting our help with her consistently friendly manner. A wonderful hostess, both at the Fellowship and during smaller Fellowship related gatherings at her home, Ruth could be counted on to know where to secure the coolest party paraphernalia at the best prices.

In 1987, the *International Association for Religious Freedom* (IARF) held its worldwide gathering at Stanford University, providing a special opportunity. As part of a District hospitality project, the BFUU agreed to host a group of foreign conference participants for the day. We, Ruth and John shuttled a group of women and men from Asia and Europe to a service at BFUU, where they met the Congregation. Afterwards, we went to John and Ruth's home for a luncheon, socializing and serious conversation, shared equally by both the women and men. For Ruth, the personal was political. She regularly took principled stands on global issues, protesting nuclear proliferation and war.

Ruth and John met and married in New York City after the war. Together they parented a daughter and two sons. Their family arrangement was unique for those times; they shared the various aspects of family life, including both financial support and especially child rearing. This enabled Ruth to resume her vocation as a social worker. Her lifelong love of music called her to specialize in music and art therapy, an innovative approach to easing emotional imbalances. Both her professional effectiveness and her successful leadership at BFUU were due to her belief in combining empathy and fair play.

# John Dunbar, 1915 - 1999



## ESCAPE THROUGH THE PYRENEES



By JOHN DUNBAR

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As his book title describes, during World War II, John made a harrowing escape from the Germans after being shot down during a bombing mission against enemy installations on the coast of France. It was Fourth of July, 1943. He tumbled through the escape hatch with his parachute. On the ground he was greeted by a man, waving a wine bottle, shouting “*camarade*.” Villagers hid him from the Germans. This was the beginning of a long journey, including walking over the Pyrenees Mountains to freedom in Spain. As part of Air Force intelligence, John shared his experiences by lecturing at numerous bases in Great Britain and the States.

Always contributing book references and reciting poetry from memory during the *Dialogue* time on Sunday mornings, John was professor of English at CCAC, California College of Arts and Crafts, as it was known then. For many years prior to being an academic, John was a journalist. He was born in West Virginia, losing his father in a mining accident when John was only nine years old. This made him sensitive to the inequities in American industries, and motivated John to support causes that advocated for workers. Having seen the devastation of war, John was an ardent anti-war activist, protesting during the Vietnam War and supporting peace efforts throughout his life.

AT BFUU in the 1980's, he participated on the Ministerial Relations Committee and was a member of the Board of Trustees during the 1980's. His experience as department chair at CCAC was a great asset to the Fellowship. John's long marriage to Ruth and their family, which included three children, was one of his greatest joys. For many years, Robbie Dunbar, he and Ruth's oldest son, was the Music Director for BFUU.

# Helene Goodwin, 1928 - 2008



Helene drumming a “cone of power” at a celebration of the publication of *Rise Up & Call Her Name* by Elizabeth Fisher, 1994, held at San Francisco UU Society

An avid participant at the Fellowship, Helene, a sociology professor, was active on the Program Committee, Denominational Affairs Committee, and Board of Trustees for many years. Besides offering her own programs, she worked with the committee to plan the yearly schedule of services. In keeping with her respect for the “interconnected web,” one of her most important program contributions was setting a calendar of holiday observances that corresponded to the changing of the seasons. Helene also brought humor and the wisdom of paganism to the Fellowship and throughout the Pacific Central District, gracing many UU gatherings with her wit and theme apparel. She was a core member of the District Covenant of UU Pagans known as the *Bay Mist Weavers* which, for many years, produced rituals at various churches and fellowships.

**Women’s Activities.** Helene traveled to the UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. We remember assisting her in her vivid presentation at BFUU about her encounters at the Conference, which included important factual information, anecdotes and beautiful slides. She always attended yearly PCD Women and Religion retreats, often offering a workshop or participating in a ritual; and she regularly attended General Assembly, reporting back on activities related to the Continental Women & Religion movement which she ardently supported.

# Geneva Agnes Gates Foote

## 1923 - 2004



### Valentine – by Geneva Gates Foote

At 80 I am still carrying  
a lot of unnecessary baggage  
I am still judgmental  
I love a little less  
when somebody does something  
I do not approve of  
I feel sorry for myself  
when my energies are low  
this only makes them lower  
and here I am taking myself to task  
heaven sakes, Geneva  
you made it to 80  
don't be afraid of who you are  
I love you  
perhaps you will be my Valentine

Geneva wrote seven books of poetry and prose, many published near the end of her life. She experienced diabetes from her youth, which caused her to go blind when she was 49. Yet, her attitude about life called her to find joy and meaning in whatever she did. She felt a strong sense of purpose, and definitely thrived in community, being a committed member of the BFUU for decades. She frequently found ways to share her unique and inspiring wisdom which was a great benefit to many of us.

### Love – by Geneva Gates Foote

The best stories are love stories  
It's not the adventurer or the power seeker  
who wins in this world  
But the one who learns to love

There is so much to know about love  
A lifetime may not be long enough to know it all  
Mostly we seek in another  
what we need ourselves  
But it is not until we give ourselves away  
That love finds us

She was always active in the **Caring Committee**, feeling one of the top priorities of a life well lived was to pay attention to the emotional and spiritual in those she encountered.

In 2001, she was honored as one of Berkeley's outstanding women and *Geneva's Path* became an official City designation.

# Sanctuary

## Ethics & Action



### 1980's Sanctuary Committee Members -Activists and Artists

Social Justice was a major concern for the Fellowship in the 1980's and 1990's. During the 1980's we were most involved with the Sanctuary Committee, a subgroup of the Social Action Committee concerned with the situation in Central America. At that time, many individuals in the Bay Area were already familiar with Latin America, having traveled there before the death squads began their campaign against liberation theology, union leaders, and teachers. Archbishop Oscar Romero, who believed in the "preferential option for the poor," was gunned down in 1980 while saying mass at the Cathedral in San Salvador; the event was broadcast on television, awakening many North Americans to the dire situation in El Salvador and throughout Central America.

**Basta! Enough!** was how many of us felt. The Sanctuary movement was born. Those of us who became active in this movement and the congregations that supported this activism saw ourselves as Americans who believed in democracy for all countries. Because it was important to us to live by our ethics, we knew we had to be visible.

Pledging to provide advocacy and protection to those fleeing persecution, the Berkeley Fellowship voted to become a Sanctuary church on June 12, 1983. The Fellowship soon joined the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant of churches and synagogues. More than half of the UU churches in the Pacific Central District took Sanctuary stands, supporting public educational efforts and coalition building around the situation in Central America, as well as offering material support.



In 1985, The Unitarian Universalist General Assembly unanimously voted to commend and support the Sanctuary Movement and condemn government surveillance of churches and fellowships. The UU Service Committee was also a major advocate of both Sanctuary and Human Rights in Central America, sponsoring many Congressional trips to the region. We (*Bob and Liz*) took on advocacy for Sanctuary at the district level. Our BFUU group was one of the most active and outspoken.

## Sanctuary Committee



### Geneva Gates Foote

A long-time chair of the Fellowship Caring Committee, Geneva counseled us to see giving Sanctuary as an act of generosity to other human beings in need. Geneva was also an accomplished writer. (See more on Geneva on her individual page.)

### Anna Ballou

An artist with multiple skills, Anna was involved in planning the outreach and educational efforts of the committee. We will remember Anna for her stalwart commitment to compassion toward Central American refugees, as well as her artful decorations at annual dinners and services.

### Martha Roberts

A politically astute participant, Martha was a committed social activist who early in her life organized coal miners in New Mexico and Colorado. Martha, a wonderful painter who focused on a wide variety of subjects, exhibited at the Fellowship. She was also a professional social worker and served on the City's Commission on Aging. A longtime member of the Fellowship, she handled her considerable physical disabilities with grace.

### Alan Robb

A theater director and actor, Alan spoke fluent Spanish and had a strong affinity for people from Latin America, having lived in South America for a number of years. He suffered a disabling stroke while a member of BFUU and this committee. Alan continued to attend the Fellowship even when he was in a wheel chair. His strength of spirit was inspiring, both when he was able and when he was infirmed.

Others, both ancestors and living, who played a major role in the committee, include: **Elizabeth MacLeod, Bill Balderston, Joan Daley, Liz Fisher, Bob Fisher**